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Census Bureau Emphasizes Electronic Reporting as 2002 Economic Census Continues

The Commerce Department's Census Bureau is reminding the 5 million businesses that received 2002 Economic Census forms in December that — for the first time — they can file their information electronically. Responses are due by Feb. 12. Businesses that received a form are required by law (Title 13, U.S. Code) to respond.

“Allowing businesses to extract data from their own spreadsheets and drop them into electronic questionnaires is a major breakthrough,” said Charles Louis Kincannon, director of the Census Bureau. “It demonstrates the Census Bureau’s commitment to e-government and translates into less reporting burden for business.”

Businesses that want to try electronic reporting can visit the Census Bureau business help site <www.census.gov/econhelp>. Using information they received with their paper form in December, they can download a Windows®-based electronic questionnaire tailored to their business. Businesses can complete the electronic forms on their own computers at their own pace and file the form on a secure Internet site or mail a diskette in to the Census Bureau.

The real payoff is for firms with dozens or even thousands of locations. Instead of having to complete a separate form for each establishment, businesses can import information from company spreadsheets right into the economic census software. “Electronic reporting can significantly lower the reporting costs incurred by some of our largest and most important businesses” says Tom Mesenbourg, assistant director of the Census Bureau. “It saves us time and money as well.”

In addition to electronic reporting, the Census Bureau’s “Business Help Site” <www.census.gov/econhelp> offers answers to questions businesses ask most often and provides other services, such as verification that their report was received. Complementing the online help site is a toll-free “help line” (1-800-233-6136), answered by Census Bureau employees from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday.

Taken every five years, the Economic Census is a benchmark for measuring 96 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan has said the Economic Census is “indispensable to understanding America’s economy.”

In addition to the Federal Reserve and other federal agencies, state and local officials use Economic Census data to design programs that promote business development. The private sector uses the data for activities such as developing business plans, calculating market shares and evaluating new business opportunities.

Data on 1,000 industries will be processed during 2003, with the first results expected in early 2004. The Economic Census will yield more than 1,700 reports and data products for states, counties, places and ZIP codes. Reports and statistics are published on the Census Bureau’s Internet site <www.census.gov>.

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